

## Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

### *Authority and Purpose*

The Arizona Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is authorized by the Older Americans Act and Arizona law. The program was implemented by the federal and state government's response to concerns that individuals residing in long-term care facilities may be subject to abuse, neglect, or substandard care, and may lack the ability to exercise their rights, or voice complaints about their circumstances. Ombudsman services are designed to improve the quality of care and the quality of life of Arizona's long-term care residents. The program's primary purpose is to identify, investigate, and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of long-term care residents.

### *Program Responsibilities*

The Arizona Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is responsible for the following: 1) Provision of information and consultation to individuals regarding long-term care issues and services; 2) Identification and advocacy regarding long-term care concerns; 3) Provision of consultation and training to facility staff; 4) Routine visits to long-term care facilities to provide residents with easy access to ombudsman service; 5) Participation in Department of Health Service (DHS) facility surveys; and 6) Working with and supporting family and resident councils.

### *Oversight and Service Delivery*

At the federal level, oversight for the Arizona Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is provided by the Administration on Aging. At the state level, oversight is provided by the Aging and Adult Administration. Ombudsman services to residents are provided at the regional level through contracts with local Area Agencies on Aging. Oversight and technical assistance to the regional Ombudsman Programs are provided by the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The regional programs employ 17 full and part-time staff. Volunteers are also an integral part of the Ombudsman Program. One hundred and twenty-eight certified ombudsman volunteers assisted the program during SFY 2001.

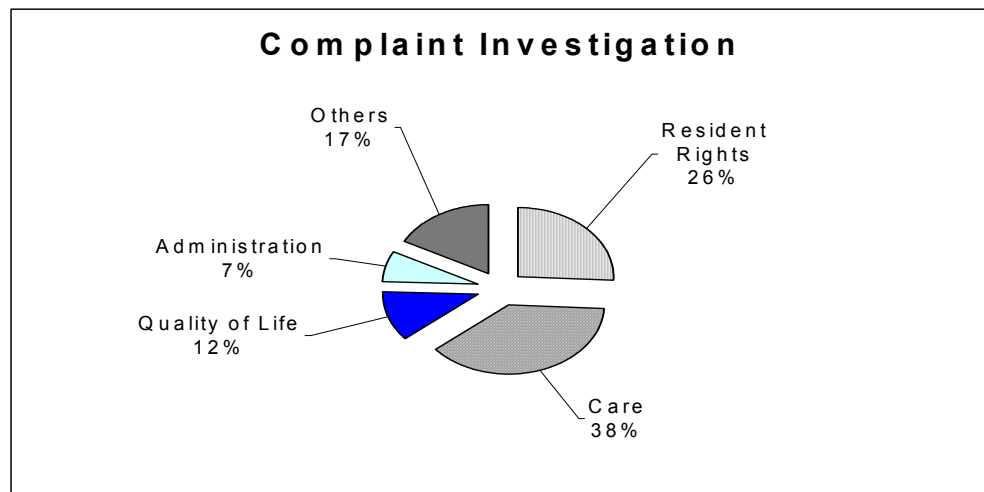
### *Facilities and Complaints*

Arizona's long-term care facilities consist of skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities. According to DHS, Arizona has approximately 1,377 long-term care facilities with beds available to accommodate approximately 40,846 residents. The Ombudsman Program has the authority to enter all facilities to

communicate with residents. This past year, the Ombudsman Program received 7,045 complaints from 3,347 complainants. Seventy-eight percent of the complaints received were substantiated. Of the complaints that were substantiated, 90% were resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. The national standard for rate of satisfaction is 71%.

Complaints involve violations of residents' rights, concerns about residents' care, problems surrounding quality of life issues, problems involving the administration of the long-term care facility, and problems involving people, systems, and agencies outside of the facility. Chart 4 shows the percentage of complaints received by type of complaint.

Chart 4 – Ombudsman Complaint Investigation



### *Challenges*

The Ombudsman Program continues to be challenged to meet the needs of long-term care residents. Resources for the program do not meet this increased demand for service. Without sufficient resources, Ombudsmen cannot make regular visits to all facilities, or provide other necessary services in a timely manner.

The changes in the provision of health care services and the increasingly complex issues generated by these changes have created a climate of confusion for health care consumers. At present there are few resources available to provide information to individuals and families to help make informed decisions. As a result, the Ombudsman Program has experienced an increased demand to provide consultation to individuals and families seeking information about long-term care.